



SERRA DA ESTRELA – AN APPROACH TO THE TERRITORY, ITS POTENTIAL AND FUTURE FOR THE WINTER TOURISM INDUSTRY

Raul Ressano Garcia

Escola Superior de Hotelaria e Turismo do Estoril, Portugal

This paper aims to explore the territory of “Serra da Estrela”, in the North of Portugal, bearing in mind some studies previously undertaken about tourism in the area, mainly focusing on snow tourism. Being snow tourism essentially connected with sports tourism the approach and methodology followed in this article is a sport related one. The literature review which was undergone raised some questions to which answers were sometimes hard to find. Nevertheless, after analyzing some published surveys and getting acquainted with the region, the article provides answers or leads to matters such as: temperature related issues, artificial snow production, renewal of infrastructures, and others. The aim of this article is to initiate a first approach to the territory, get to know its main problems and analyse some proposals to solve some of the latter as suggested by some of the analysed case studies. Personal experience from 35 years of practical experience in winter sports is also provided.

Keywords: Winter tourism, Ski resort, Ski trail, Serra da Estrela, Portugal.

INTRODUCTION

The aim of this paper is to study the possibility of enlargement of the Portuguese ski resort of Serra da Estrela in a way that it might compete against its closer competitors. In this study we are going to learn what are the main factors that attract Portuguese to ski resorts and also if it is possible to create an environment with these factors in the Portuguese ski resort of Serra da Estrela.

METHODOLOGY

The first step is to know what attracts Portuguese to ski resorts. This step will be accomplished by literature review.

The second step is to study if it is possible to create an environment with these factors in the Portuguese ski resort of Serra da Estrela. This step will be accomplished by literature review, geographic information systems and local observation.

The third step is to compare the ski resort of Serra da Estrela with 3 others ski resorts that compete directly with the Portuguese mountain and see if it have a chance to compete.

LITERATURE REVIEW

According to the French study (CAT, 2005), the European ski lift leaders are France with 4013 ski lifts, then Austria with 3111, then Switzerland with 2354 and then Italy with 2204. In the Iberia the leader is Spain with 328 ski lifts, then Andorra with 104 and Portugal with 5 ski lifts in the mountain of Serra da Estrela (Turistrela, 2010).

Serra da Estrela is the highest mountain of Portugal with approximately 2000 meters and it separates the north of Portugal from its center. Nowadays the Serra da Estrela ski resort has 5 ski lifts and 12 km of ski trails. The place in the top of the mountain is called Torre, and during winter time, sometimes is not possible to get there because the roads are closed for too much snow. (IMT, 2010)

The ski resort of Serra da Estrela has several roads to get there, from which we would like to salient the road from Covilhã and the road that comes from Seia.

According to the information from ski resorts, more than 50.000 Portuguese went to skiing abroad for a week.

9.000 Portuguese went skiing in Serra de Bejar. (<http://www.sierradebejar-lacovatilla.com/>)
 28.000 Portuguese went skiing in Sierra Nevada. (<http://www.sierranevada.es/>)
 16.000 Portuguese went skiing in Baqueira Beret. (<http://www.baqueira.es/>)

More than 50.000 Portuguese have been skiing abroad. They spend 300.000 nights abroad, they eat 600.000 meals and they bought 250.000 forfaits. Portuguese traveled 30.000.000 km mostly by car to Spain, France and Andorra.

According to literature review (Carvalho, 2007) there are three main factors that influence the way Portuguese choose their ski resort.

- Distance from their home in the city to ski resort
- Number of kilometers and quality of ski trails
- Distance from mountain accommodation to ski trails

Let's start by analyses the first factor. The majority of Portuguese that usually practice snow ski leaves in Lisbon. The distance from Lisbon to ski resorts are approximately 500 km to Serra de Bejar, 800 km to Sierra Nevada and 1400 km to Baqueira Beret. The distance from Lisbon to Serra da Estrela is only about 300 km. (google earth)

The second factor was the Number of kilometers and the quality of ski trails. According to the information provided by the ski resorts, Serra de Bejar has 26 km, Sierra Nevada has 102 km and Baqueira Beret 120 km. Nowadays Serra da Estrela only have 12 km of ski trails.

The third factor that influences the choice is the distance from ski trails to mountain accommodation. In Serra de Bejar de distance from mountain accommodation to ski trails is approximately 8 km. In Sierra Nevada and Bakera Beret the distance is 0 km, and in Serra da Estrela the distance is about 20 km.

PROPOSAL

The proposal is based in the literature review and in a first observation of the landscape. The proposal intends to improve the main factors that condition the choice of ski resort destination in the ski resort of Serra da Estrela.

Our proposal defends

The construction of 2 villages close to the ski trail
Increase ski trails to 32 km

The first village would be on the road that starts in Torre and goes to Seia. This village would be close to the lowest part of the existing ski trails, in the left part of the road. The right side of the road will be destined to build a car parking.

The second village would be on the road starting in Torre and going to Covilhã. This village would be close to lowest part of the proposed ski trails. Close to the village is planned a car parking. All this hillside that comes from the top of the mountain, in a place called Torre, to the village would be filled up with new ski trails.

COMPETITION

To analyze the competition we choose three ski resorts with special conditions.

Let us start with Serra de Bejar, it is the Spanish ski resort closest to the Portuguese ski resort of Serra da Estrela. We can say that it is the most direct competitor against the Portuguese Serra da Estrela.

The second competitor is Sierra Nevada in the south of Spain close to Granada. Sierra Nevada is known because of its nice weather. This ski resort is probably the one that has more Portuguese skiing every year.

The third competitor that we choose is Baqueira Beret in Pyrenees in the frontier between Spain and France. Baqueira Beret is probably the ski resort that welcomes more Portuguese in the Pyrenees.

We decide to compare the three main factors that we previously saw that contributed to the decision of choosing the ski resort with Serra da Estrela.

According to the current situation we can see Serra da Estrela and its competitors' main factors.

	Distance from mountain accommodation to ski trails	Number of kms of ski trails	Distance from Lisbon to mountain
Serra de Bejar	8 km	26 km	500 km
Sierra Nevada	0 km	102 km	800 km
Baqueira Beret	0 km	120 km	1400 km
Serra da Estrela	20 km	12 km	300 km

As we can see Serra da Estrela loose against its opponents in terms of distance from mountain accommodation to ski trails and number of k kilometers of ski trails. Serra da Estrela only wins in the third decisional main factor because it has the shortest distance from Lisbon to mountain.

According to our proposal the situation would slightly change.

As we can see according to our proposal, Serra da Estrela can win against its direct competitor of Serra de Bejar in terms of distance from mountains accommodation to ski trails.

Serra da Estrela also can win against Serra de Bejar in the factor of number of km of ski trails. The third decisional main factor is the distance from Lisbon to mountain and Serra da Estrela win against all the others competitors.

	Distance from mountain accommodation to ski trails	Number of kms of ski trails	Distance from Lisbon to mountain
Serra de Bejar	8 km	26 km	500 km
Sierra Nevada	0 km	102 km	800 km
Baqueira Beret	0 km	120 km	1400 km
Serra da Estrela	0 km	32 km	300 km

CONCLUSION

In the present time, Serra da Estrela has a very weak competitiveness when it is compared with its major opponents in terms of the three main decisional attraction factors. Nowadays more than 50.000 Portuguese are skiing abroad. They spend 300.000 nights abroad, they eat 600.000 meals and they buy 250.000 forfaits.

If we compare the three main decisional attraction factors according to our proposal, Serra da Estrela can be a much serious competitor against the foreign ski resorts. Serra da Estrela could save Portuguese from spending 300.000 nights abroad, eat 600.000 meals and buy 250.000 forfaits.

REFERENCES

<http://www.sierranevada.es/> - visited in December 2010.

<http://www.sierradebejar-lacovatilla.com/> - visited in December 2010.

<http://www.baqueira.es/> - visited in December 2010.

Google earth.

Instituto de Meteorologia de Portugal (IMT) – www.meteo.pt – visited in December 2010.

LE POSITIONNEMENT DE L'OFFRE FRANÇAISE DE SPORTS D'HIVER - Etude réalisée par le Cabinet Architecture et Territoire (CAT) pour le compte de la direction du Tourisme (février 2005).

Mário João Paulo de Jesus Carvalho - Os desportos de Inverno e o reposicionamento da oferta na Região de Turismo da Serra da Estrela - Dissertação para obtenção do Grau de Mestre em Gestão Estratégica e Desenvolvimento do Turismo (2007).

PETUR – Plano Estratégico de Turismo da Serra da Estrela realizado pela Universidade da Beira Interior (Março de 2006).

Turistrela – www.turistrela.pt – visited in December 2010.